Dita Beard

Falstaffian, Abrasive, Down Emotional, Loyal, Generous

By Michael Kernan and Dorothy McCardle

Dita Davis Beard is an emotional woman, ferocious in her loyalties and in her love for her five children, a blunt woman who apparently thrives in the competitive, driving world of Washington politics, yet a woman who always seems to have room in her house for young waifs and wanderers.

The International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation lobbyist is a central figure in the controversy surrounding Richard Kleindienst's nomination as Attorney General. A memo, reportedly written by her to her boss, linked settlement of a government antitrust case against ITT with a subsidiary firm's promise of financial aid for the Republican National Convention.

Now isolated in a Denver hospital and suffering a heart ailment, the 53-year-old Mrs. Beard has been an enigma to the public. But this portrait emerges from old news clips and interviews with her family and associates.

A Washington debutante in 1939, daughter of Col. (late Gen.) Robert Davis, the Kansas-born Miss Davis was called a "cosmopolite" by gushing society writers. She rode horseback, swam, hunted and played tennis, loved opera and Bach and Chanel perfume, was a crack shot and a fine dancer.

Twenty years later, separated from her second husband but determined not to seek financial help from anyone, she worked parttime or fulltime as a secretary and even ferried cars to help keep her Arlington home and to support the children. She was to pay for educating all of them, from prep schools to law school, though she herself never completed high school, after a brilliant start and skipping grades almost yearly.

The children are Edwina McLane (Lane), 25, who works for the Republican National Committee and lives in Crystal House apartments in Arlington; Benjamin W., 24, a law student at Florida's Stetson University; Robert Davis (Dave), 23, a University of Virginia graduate currently visiting in Denver; Emma Lundy, 18, in Tennessee,

tantes in the Capital by one of the attractive members of the sub-debutante set.

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Star

Miss Dita Davis, who recently returned with her family from California, is the daughter of Col. and Mrs. Robert Davis, U. S. A. She will bow to society Wednesday, November 29.

Although Dita prefers a more conservative and conventional exist-

MISS DITA DAVIS.

—Harris-Ewing Photo.

ence, she would not have missed for the world her glamorous life in the West among the Hollywood celebrities. She is a thoroughly likeable, even-tempered person, full of natural charm. Taller by far than the average girl, Dita is really appreciative of her height. She is a skilled equestrienne and an excellent shot with a .45 or a .22. Before she ever hummed a popular tune she knew all the operas.

She is happy about coming-out here this winter and looks forward

A Washington newspaper clipping about Dita Davis, a few days before she was presented to Capital society.

to Earth...

..and Blunt

and Cameron (Bull), 16, at a Virginia military school.

Benjamin gave this picture of his mother:

"People have said that she used bad langugae (some associates have called her Falstaffian, boisterous, foul-mouthed), but for her the only really profane words were those of deceit and dishonesty. Sure she used some four-letter words, but it was just for effect. She wants to like people; she is an optimist who tries to believe she's a cynic. The main things she taught us were loyalty to ourselves and family unity. She couldn't stand lies."

One issue in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee last week was Mrs. Beard's drinking, described by her own physician as "excessive when under tension." A frequent visitor at the Capitol Hill Club, next door to Republican National Committee headquarters, she was usually quiet, according to the manager, who said he "never saw any evidence of too much drinking." Others say they have.

See BEARD, B2, Col. 1

United Press International

ITT lobbyist Dita Davis Beard, "a central figure in the controversy surrounding Richard Kleindienst's nomination as Attorney General.

BEARD, From B1

"She is a hard drinker," said Ben Beard, "but she has great capacity. I never heard of her getting drunk in public. She never lets go, except maybe like at a family Christmas party."

Mrs. Beard's attorney, David Fleming, said, 'She's never missed a morning meeting in her life."

Very strict with her children, she urged them to try any smoking or drinking at home first, and just before Ben went off to military school she sat him down with a bottle of champagne to teach him how to drink. Once Ben was suspected of sneaking a smoke and was made to chew a cigarette, not because of the smoking but because of the deceit. Actually the culprit was one of his brothers, he added.

Mrs. Beard, an inveterate camper, snowmobiler and skier, owns a red Volkswagen bus fitted out with pull-down beds and a fully stocked bar.

"Once in West Virginia," Ben said, "she saw a soldier stranded with a flat. She insisted on fixing it herself and told him to get in the bus and relax with a drink. Well, pretty soon some other kids came along and saw what was happening and next thing you know they were having a great party there by the side of the highway."

Mrs. Beard's love of practical jokes is a family tradition. The children "play rough," as her son put it, and as late as last year the whole family held an annual Eastern egg fight with raw eggs. Other stories concerned hilarious water fights, ice-water dumpings and pie fights, including one epic battle that ended with the kitchen being hosed down along with the participants.

"She wanted us to be able to laugh at ourselves," Ben added, "and once she put some women's underwear in my suitcase when I went off to school. She wanted to playfully embarrass me a little."

A talented cook who disdains cookbooks and claims not to like cooking, she became expert at putting together a meal in an hour or less, usually stews, soups or spaghetti. Parties at the house—a modest two-story red brick building on South June Street—often were buffet-style.

A tremendously emotional woman, Mrs. Beard cries at parades and funerals alike, her son said. "She's extremely generous and kind and believes money is to be used. She'll never be rich. (ITT sources placed her salary at about $30,000 plus an expense account.) She loves music, used to play the piano and a few years ago bought an organ for the house. She also used to sing. She loves opera and classical but for popular music she likes Burt Bacharach most, I guess because of that semi-sweet sadness."

The son recounted how his mother joined the Red Cross in 1941, met her first husband, fighter pilot Benjamin W. Atwood, while serving in Corsica (where she would pull airmen out of burning jeeps and planes, her attorney said), married in 1945 and divorced him in 1950—he died in a plane crash in 1967. Two years later she married businessman Cameron Randolph Beard, whom she divorced in 1959 after an uneven marriage that took her from Alabama to Florida to Virginia.

Patriotic and staunchly Republican (though because of the frequent moves she first registered to vote quite late), she got her first political post as secretary in the 1960 Nixon campaign. There she worked with Everett Hart of the TV section in a New York office next door to the offices of H. R. Haldeman, Herbert Klein and other early Nixon aides.

"She was hail-fellow-well-met," commented Hart, "heart of gold and all that. She liked hunting, was a leathery outdoor woman, a darn good worker. We used to call her 'southern gentility gone wrong' as a joke. She was very efficient, tough, loyal — and appealing."

Hart saw her as "a dynamic, interesting woman, a real pro who could get things done and who could ease your way if she liked you, taking care of complaints and making arrangements, things like that." She was, he added, one of about 30 people in the New York offices and was on first-name terms with top Nixon people.

Edward Gerrity, ITT vice president for public relations, said that Mrs. Beard, a tall, dark-haired woman, "has the vocabulary of a drill instructor in the Marines." The military image came up in comments from several other business and political associates: "Cusses like a Marine drill sergeant when upset"; "talks like a man"; "abrasive and unpleasant." But other associates saw her style rather differently: "Never offensive"; "she can be really funny"; "a robust sense of humor"; "very warm and human, down to earth, with no airs."

A former ITT employee who used to visit her home said that Mrs. Beard was not only helpful to disturbed young people but was also "the first to hold out a helping hand to anybody in trouble. She is very unselfish. She would take people who were disturbed to her home to spend the night, giving them room and board without any compensation."

A former congressional aide described her as "big-hearted, generous and foul-mouthed" and noted that two teen-age boys were saved from trouble with the law by "all-night talks with Dita." The aide noted, "Her shoulder has always been available for young people to lay their heads on and cry their hearts out."

A conservative dresser, she didn't seem especially interested in clothes, and sometimes her chain-smoking would leave ashes spilling down an expensive dress.

Curiously, several other lobbyists denied knowledge of Mrs. Beard, though she has been with ITT since 1961 and was one of 10 lobbyists featured in a 1966 Fortune magazine article. According to ITT officials she is on leave of absence, not sick leave.

Perhaps the word that sums up Dita Beard more than any other is bluntness. And in a town where a reputation can rise and fall as easily as an eyebrow, bluntness is a dangerously visible quality to have.